

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 /026 W

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R 080320Z AUG 73

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2465

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

USDEL JEC PARIS

CINCPAC

COMUSSAG

S E C R E T PHNOM PENH 8158

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CB

SUBJ: IN TAM AND RESIGNATION

REF: PHNOM PENH 7928

1. CALLING AUGUST 7 ON PRIME MINISTER IN TAM TO EXPRESS CONDOLENCE FOR THE PREVIOUS DAY'S BOMBING ACCIDENT AT NEAK LOEUNG, CHARGE FOUND HIM WRITING YET ANOTHER RESIGNATION LETTER TO LON NOL. IN TAM REFERRED TO SOME NEW BUT INDISTINCT SLIGHT FROM SOSTHENE, AND SPOKE IN GENERAL TO "INSUPPORTABLE WORKING CONDITIONS".

2. WE TOOK THIS ONE MORE COLDLY THAN THE LAST (REFTEL). IF IN TAM WERE REALLY POPULAR AS HE HAD SAID, WOULDN'T HIS DEPARTURE AS PRIME MINISTER BE INTERPRETED BY THE PEOPLE AS A VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT? IN TAM SAID THAT IT WOULD. HADN'T HE SAID THAT THE SURVIVAL OF THE REPUBLIC DEPENDED ON SUSTAINING THE MORALE AND WILL OF THE PEOPLE? IN TAM SAID THAT HE HAD. WOULD IT NOT THEN BE UNPATRIOTIC, WHATEVER "THE WORKING CONDITIONS," TO DELIVER SUCH A BLOW TO THE REPUBLIC AT A CRITICAL MOMENT? WE ADDED THAT THIS CONSTANT TALK OF SECRET

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RESIGNATION IS NOT ADDING TO HIS REPUTATION AS A MAN WHO KNOWS HOW TO GOVERN, AND OFFERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO HIS ADVERSARIES TO DISCREDIT HIM.

3. AFTER SOME EXCHANGE, IN TAM SUGGESTED THAT THE ANSWER MIGHT BE FOR SOSTHENE TO STOP ENTIRELY ANY PUBLIC OR POLITICAL STATEMENTS. WE AGREED, BUT SAID THAT ON HIS SIDE IN TAM WOULD HAVE TO STOP TALK ABOUT RESIGNATION AND AGREE TO WORK ON UNTIL THE SURVIVAL OF THE REPUBLIC IS DEMONSTRATED AND NORMAL POLITICAL EVOLUTION CAN RESUME, SAY SEPTEMBER 15.

4. COMMENT: THE CONVERSATION WAS INCONCLUSIVE. WE SHALL, HOWEVER, TALK TO SOSTHENE AND RETURN TO IN TAM ON THIS.

5. ONE CAN SYMPATHIZE WITH IN TAM AS A POLITICIAN. HE DOES HAVE A REAL POPULAR FOLLOWIING, AND HE HAS BEFORE HIM THE EXAMPLE OF SON NGOC THANH WHO LOST IN SIX MONTHS A LIFETIME'S REPUTATION BY PARTICIPATING IN A LON NOL GOVERNMENT IN WHICH HE MANIFESTLY HAD NO POWER OF DECISION.

6. BUT IN TAM IS A PATRIOT ALSO, AS WELL AS A MAN OF SOME PRSONAL AMBITION, AND WE CAN PLAY ON THOSE QUALITIES IN AN EFFORT TO KEEP THE PRESENT STRUCTURE TOGETHER.

7. WE SHOULD NONETHELESS THINK OF ALTERNATIVES. ONE POSSIBILITY THAT BOTH IN TAM AND LON NOL HAVE MENTIONED, IS TO MAKE SIRIK PRIME MINISTER. ANOTHER IS TO LOOK TO THE INDEPENDENT AND ENERGETIC SOK CHHONG TO BE PRIME MINISTER CONCURRENTLY WITH HIS PRESENT ROLE OF NATIONAL BANK GOVERNOR. THE DIFFICULTY IS THAT BOTH CANDIDATES WOULD PRESUMABLY REQUIRE A SUBSTANTIAL CABINET RESHUFFLE, WHICH WOULD TAKE TIME AND CREATE AN UNFAVORABLE PUBLIC IMAG AT A CRITICAL MOMENT.
ENDERS

SECRET

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